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## DOCUMENTS

### AN ACCOUNT OF THE VOYAGE MADE BY THE FRIGATES "PRINCESA" AND "FAVORITA" IN THE YEAR 1799 FROM SAN BLAS TO NORTHERN ALASKA

(Translated from an Unpublished Manuscript in the Archives of the University  
of Santa Clara, California)<sup>1</sup>

An account of the voyage made by Father John Riobó, as chaplain of His Majesty's frigates *la Princesa* and *la Favorita* to discover new lands and seas north of the settlements of the ports of Monterey and of our Father, San Francisco; whose Missions are in charge of the Apostolic Missionaries of the College of San Fernando of Mexico.

#### Departure—Storm and Vow to the Blessed Virgin

In the Frigate called the *Princesa*, naval Lieutenant, Don Ignatius Orteaga of the Royal Armada, went as Commandant of the expedition, Lieutenant Don Fernando Quiros y Miranda of the Royal Armada being second in command.

The Captain of the other Frigate, the *Favorita*, was a Lieutenant of the same rank, Don Juan Francis de la Bodega y Cuadra. This last ship carried 107 men on the roll and supplies for fifteen months, and the *Princesa*, a crew of 98 men with food for nineteen months. Both of them had a supply of water for seven months.

On February 11, 1779, we left the Port of San Blas at about midnight sailing to windward and casting anchor near the coast with light land breezes. On the twenty-fifth we decided to depart southward from Marias Islands unable, as we were, to make headway towards the north. On the twenty-sixth we doubled the Islands and we still had winds from the Fourth Quadrant blowing from the northwest and we lost always in Latitude until March 5. The winds then began to vary from north to northwest. We had reached at that time 19 degrees 47 minutes north latitude and 8 degrees 21 minutes west of the meridian of San Blas.<sup>2</sup>

With winds blowing in the same direction we crossed the tropic on the seventeenth of the same month.

As soon as we left the torrid zone, the winds became very strong so that we were obliged to lie to several times, reefed sometimes with mainsail or foresail, sometimes with staysail. On April 4, the winds began to change towards the

<sup>1</sup> The original is in a sort of commonplace book, which was kept by the Franciscans at Santa Clara Mission and was found in the library there by the Jesuit Fathers when they took over the Mission about 1851. The translation is by the Very Rev. Walter Thornton, S.J., the present Rector of the University of Santa Clara. The book belonged to the old Santa Clara Mission, which was founded in 1777 and contains many private notes of the Superior on matters relating to the Indians. The book is about 2 inches thick; the pages are in splendid condition with no frayed edges; the edges are not cut sharply but are as in the old hand-made paper of the times. The pages are 8½ inches in length by 6 inches in width. The Mss. of the *Voyage* is 8 folios long. The ink is a little faded, but clear. In the original there are twenty-four paragraphs, each paragraph being numbered, but in another hand from the original. The folio is written on both sides. The handwriting is good, and in marked contrast to the other letters of the collection. The present translation came to the Review through Mr. Michael Williams, of Carmel, California. Cf. GREENHOW, *History of Oregon and California and the other Territories on the Northwest Coast of North America*, 2nd Ed., p. 125. Boston, 1845; PALOU, *Noticias*, t. iv, c. 2, pp. 71-73.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the meridian is taken from San Blas. This will account for the longitude in the narrative.

second quadrant and during that night a northeast wind rushed in on us with great fury and the frigate was tossed about violently. Nothing remained in place, even the medicine chest, notwithstanding its great weight, was thrown about and the greater part of its syrups, essential oils, and medicines were lost.

We continued on without further incident until the nineteenth, and reached about the forty-first degree of latitude and the thirty-seventh of longitude when we were assailed by a fierce southeastern storm. The hurricane raged all night, and we ran with the foresail only as we feared to carry more sail. On the twentieth in this storm, we lost sight of the *Favorita*, till then our inseparable companion.

On the morning of the same day, I went with the Commandant to the quarter deck, and in the name of all the crew on the Frigate he made a vow to Our Lady of the Rosary, patroness of the frigate. He promised the foresail as an offering at her shrine and likewise that he would carry, barefooted, the mast in procession to the Church at San Blas, if the Blessed Virgin would obtain our delivery from this and other dangers which we might encounter and should we return safely to harbor. As if a reward of this promise, Our Lady favored us with her powerful protection. Indeed, it would be difficult to find another example of a voyage of discovery fraught with so many dangers and so happily ended.

Henceforth the winds continued as favorable as we could wish although the rain and cold were annoying. We directed our course for the harbor of Bucareli.<sup>3</sup> There we arrived on May 3, and met the *Favorita* which had entered at two o'clock in the morning, preceding us by only ten hours after fourteen days of separation. The wind did not allow us to cast anchor nearby, but we succeeded on the east coast in front of a small bay which we found later to be a fine port and to which we gave the name of Santa Cruz because we discovered it on Holy Cross day.

Here again we experienced the effects of Divine Providence which guided us. Compelled by the current and much more by strong gusts of wind we dropped anchor provisionally in the first propitious spot we met, intending to choose a better location later. There was not the least suspicion of danger. The next morning, however, at ebb tide we beheld an enormous rock directly in front of the ship. It was scarcely further from us than the length of the frigate. We would have been undoubtedly wrecked, had we advanced a little farther. On May 6, the two frigates went to a safe anchorage within the harbor of Santa Cruz. There were no other incidents worthy of note during the trip so far other than that the weather was persistently cold and there was much rain. We had also to regret the death of one soldier and a naval gunner.

### Indians and Their Customs

From the first day we tried to get in touch with the Indians, searching for them among their rancherias. After having hidden their women in the woods, they came to us with signs and tokens of peace, some throwing white feathers in

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<sup>3</sup> Bucareli is situated on the southern extremity of Prince of Wales Island.

the air from a promontory on the sea, and others, standing in a line on the shore with their arms extended in the form of a cross. We gave gifts to each of them and they in turn gave us fish. The fish was of the ordinary kind, a very common species, yet as we were in great need of fresh food, we appreciated it highly. From that day they continued to come to our vessels at all hours, but especially at sunrise and sunset, bringing with them various articles for trading—fish, sleeping mats made of the bark of a certain tree, skins of seal, otter, deer, bear and other animals. They showed us their weapons and even traded us some of them. Their arrows are very finely made; some of them are pointed with flint, some with bone, but most of them have heads of copper and iron and they are very sharp. These Indians have a kind of armor something like that of the ancients with buckler and spear; they have even protection for their thighs and legs, very skilfully made from pieces of hard wood joined and fastened together with a kind of very strong cord. On their heads they carry the figure of a ferocious beast rather skilfully and artfully carved from wood. They are extremely fond of iron of which they possess many lances and knives. Their lances are very well made and are very straight and regular in form; some having a spear head twenty-four inches in length with a very long and well made staff. The knives are short with double cutting edges like a carpenter's plane. They are very desirous of obtaining copper and iron but they are chiefly anxious for iron, so much so that as soon as they see a piece of barrel hoop they care no longer for glass beads, mirrors, rings or anything else that is presented to them. Among these Indians three shades of color are found; some in complexion and features are very light Europeans; others have more the appearance of Indians especially in hair features and color; others again are just Indians like the rest found in America.

I sang a Mass of thanksgiving ashore on Ascension Day and some of the Indians attended it. On this occasion I preached a short sermon. In memory of the Feast the great guns of the frigates were fired, but the Indians showed no fear. Yet, when they first heard the report of the guns on our arrival they betook themselves to precipitate flight.

#### Exploration of the Land

After paying this homage to the Blessed Virgin, two boats armed and provided with food for eighteen days, were sent out to survey the bay, which penetrates far inland between mountains covered with fir trees and snow on the northern side. Don Francis Mourelle, the sailing master, who had the rank of Ensign on the Frigate, and his first mate Don Joseph Camacho, belonging to the Armada, together with the second officer of the *Favorita*, Don Juan Bautista de Aguirre and Don Juan Pantajo y Arriaga, took part in the expeditions.

After spending twenty-six days on their reconnoiter—an interval which we made good use of by taking in water, ballast and wood—they returned on June 12. Their return was a great relief to us as we feared that some mishap had befallen them. Indeed, everything was to be feared as a very great number of Indians, in more than one hundred canoes had come to establish themselves

in a cove of this harbor. They showed themselves so bold that they stole everything they could and went so far as to throw down the cross erected on the occasion of the Thanksgiving ceremonies, in order to obtain the nails.

The men brought back with them a map they made of the bay and the littoral. The work was done thoroughly and is of great importance.

We find that the place in which we now are is rather an arm of the sea than a bay. It contains ten harbors, each one very safe and sheltered. There is plenty of water, ballast and wood on the shore, a great many bays, numberless islands, and further on several arms of the sea which penetrate deeply into the land. These run to the north, east, northeast and northwest further than they were able to observe. The Indians robbed them of many necessary articles whenever they had an opportunity. They frequently attacked them, defied them to fight and kept them ever on the watch day and night. The men did not wish to harm them, but as the Indians became more bold every moment, scorned their arms and bragged repeatedly of their own power, they were compelled to act. They trained their guns on two of the canoes that were empty and demolished them without injuring the Indians. Finally they caught one of them who was more audacious than the rest and after whipping him with rods for a few moments, let him go. They were not troubled after this.

#### Desertion of Two Seamen and Trouble with the Indians

On June 13 the crew went to wash their clothes on the shore opposite to that which was occupied by the Indians, and with whom, after the unfortunate experience of the boats, we began again to treat freely.

On leaving, two sailors of the *Favorita* were missing. Our men turned back to look for them, but as they did not appear, an Indian of some authority among them was held as a prisoner. Once on board he was made to understand that if he was kept a prisoner, it was merely because two of our men were missing and that he should tell his people to bring them back. He shouted and a canoe arrived and after having spoken with the Indians on it, he told us that the seamen were in the Indian settlement and that at sunrise they would bring them back. They failed to so do, however; they brought only one in a canoe and stopped far from the frigate. The man was well hidden and as soon as they uncovered him we told him to come aboard. He answered that they would not allow him and we could see that the Indians took away an oar which he had seized in order to row to us. They brought him back to their hamlet shouting fiercely. At this the Indian on board was much vexed that they did not keep their promise. We were much troubled at this incident and we thought it a sufficient reason for breaking off with the Indians and recovering by force the two seamen. We pitied the poor Indians, however, and resolved to try other means. We determined therefore to capture some more of them in order that a greater number might make an exchange possible. For this purpose we managed to have an old Indian come to our frigate, but he was a little suspicious and went back saying that he would wait in his own canoe until it was boarded by our pilot's mate. This latter was advised to do so, but to make good his escape and enter our boat at the first opportunity. The Indians,

however, were very sharp and noticing that their old man was not coming back and that the pilot's mate was very eager to leave them and get into our boat, they seized him by force and tried to head their canoes for the shore. In order to scare them three or four musket shots were fired and at the same instant the *Favorita* began to shoot. Being afraid, the natives started to row very rapidly, but their canoes collided and some of them capsized. Immediately our boats went to the help of the drowning Indians. None were lost. In all we picked up about a score of them. We brought them aboard and gave them plenty to eat. They surely ate splendidly. After giving them presents of cloth to cover themselves, we made them understand that all this had been done merely because we wanted back our two men. We assured them that we wished to be their friends, but that we must have our two men back. They took leave of us with the best signs of friendship, our boats taking them to the Indian settlement to make the exchange. It was effected in the following manner. They gave one of our seamen for the old Indian who spent the night on board the *Favorita* and the other missing man for all the crowd of captives. They were a little reluctant to do this because the last sailor was held in a different settlement. We were very glad to receive our men again, but they confessed that they had deserted of their own accord, and that the Indians were not to blame. The Captain ordered them punished as well for their desertion as for the amount of trouble given to the expedition. They were tied to a gun and given twenty lashes.

We found afterwards and it grieved us very much that an Indian had been killed by a gunshot. The Captain felt, however, that it was very necessary that the Indians should understand that an attack on us in great numbers would be met with determination. He tried his best, however, not to injure them in any way.

#### Bucareli—The Native Women

On the evening of that day the Indians left and we sailed on the fifteenth to pursue our course, but contrary winds obliged us to enter the harbor of San Antonio which lies on the opposite side of Santa Cruz. Although we tried to do so twice, we were not able to depart until July 10. We took leave, not without much regret, of the Indians who had come to settle there in order to be near us.

During the fifty-eight days we spent in Bucareli, only ten or twelve were clear. During the rest of the time the weather was bad—winds, fogs and rains as in the severest winter, the greater part of the country is rocky and the arable land, which is scarce, is covered with very tall fir trees even down to the very shore. We found there also a variety of flowering plants and among them a certain herb or seed very like to the common rye, both as to the leaves and the product.

So great is the eagerness of the Indians for iron that even the women carried a little knife hanging to their neck with which they make and carve from wood, trays of different shapes, very beautifully worked. These women have fine features and some are exceedingly white but all make themselves hideous by a

little tablet, two fingers wide, which they carry on their under lip. There is a horizontal incision for that purpose and they insert the wooden tablet through the opening until it rests against the teeth. It is considered a distinctive mark of married women. The unmarried women have only an incision in the lip from which they hang a small stick or a copper needle. They have many ornaments made of this metal. The women are all very warlike and full of scars due according to their own report to stabs with knives.

We have the pleasure of bringing back with us three little boys who were abandoned by the Indians who told us that they did not want them. The youngest of these was brought aboard to my companion, Father Mathias, one evening while I was on land visiting the sick in the barracks. He was very sick and weak; with great care however, he was soon out of danger.

#### Northward to Alaska

On July 1, we succeeded in clearing the entrance of Bucareli which is situated in the 55 degrees and 18 minutes of north latitude and 32 degrees of longitude. On account of the winds we went southward, reaching the fifty-third degree. With a favorable wind we started north again and the same day land was sighted at 58 degrees and 30 minutes but the wind prevented us from exploring it. The weather continued at that time very dark and foggy until July 16, when with a favorable wind and clear sky we continued our journey north of the fifty-ninth degree. The shore is very precipitous and entirely covered with snow down to the sea. We distinguished some very high mountains which rose above the clouds, particularly one which can compete with the most famous peaks known anywhere.

On July 17, we were able to see Cape St. Elias situated in the 60th degree of latitude and the 43d degree of longitude, a position very different from the one it has on the Russian map. We saw also the island immediately opposite and to which the Commandant gave the name of Carmel because it was discovered on the day dedicated to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.<sup>4</sup> Until the twenty-first we were crossing the large bay which forms a coast in that place. On the evening of July 20, having mounted to the quarter deck, as I was about to sit down on the so-called patience bench, I fainted and remained senseless for some time. The Commandant and the Surgeon hurried to my assistance and with the remedies they gave me I recovered entirely. Perhaps it was an effect of sleeplessness because for ten days I was not able to close my eyes.

On the twenty-first of the same month we arrived at a large harbor in the same direction as the passage we were seeking. We called it St. James the Apostle because at that time we were celebrating the novena of the Saint and also because as the patron of Spain he would be our help during this voyage. Here we took possession of this harbor in the name of the King. It is situated in 60 degrees 13 minutes north latitude and 45 degrees 30 minutes longitude.<sup>5</sup>

The island which lies in that harbor we called St. Mary Magdalene. Our first mate with the rank of Ensign of the Frigate and a companion sailed in a

<sup>4</sup> Probably Middleton Island.

<sup>5</sup> This was probably Prince William Sound.

boat to find if there was any passage in the northerly direction towards the west of the island in the direction of the coast. They came back announcing that the coast ran from the south as a prolongation from the Cape of St. Elias with very high lands covered with snow.

### Eskimos

We decided on account of this report to follow the coast in order to see whether the passage could be found farther north. We treated with Indians who met us three miles out at sea in several canoes of a very particular construction. These canoes are made with curved forms covered with a strong skin, very well and tightly sown. They have only two holes like the mouth of an earthen jar and in each an Indian takes his place. When the two occupants are in their place the canoes are so tightly closed that it is impossible even in a rough sea for anything inside to get wet. At first sight in the distance we thought that there were many Indians approaching but as they came closer we saw that there were only six. They are much fairer of complexion than those at Bucareli and much more curious. They wear a kind of short jacket made of the skin of animals and stitched with a string like that of a guitar and very nicely made. They are ashamed to appear naked and never do so. Besides these six in these three canoes the men of our boat saw about two hundred persons coming in six common but large canoes. They were friendly to them but did not notice anything further. The women had their hair cut short and a string of big beads hanging down to their chest from the corners of their mouth where they were attached. The men carried a bone artistically carved and ornamented on the upper lip and like the other Indians they are very much inclined to steal and they are very cunning in doing it. Just imagine, one day while on board, they stole an iron hook belonging to the frigate of such great weight that it would seem incredible. The next day, however, the very Indian who had taken it returned to steal something else and he was caught. Though we had not missed the hook, when asked if he had taken anything else he confessed it publicly and on search we found that the hook was gone. He promised to return it but as we had to sail the same day we did not recover it. In this bay there are many fish of fine quality. The forests, however, are neither as great nor the trees as tall as at Bucareli. The trees, however, belong to the same species and there are extensive fields of green grass.

On July 28 we sailed and from the twenty-ninth we began to experience very threatening and cloudy weather and terrible rains and strong winds from the first quadrant. The winds soon became hurricanes and the days were made up of raging storms. There was the greatest fear of shipwreck surrounded as we were with islands and great rocks in the vicinity of the coast which from time to time we could glimpse through the breaks in the clouds. In such dangers we spent several days and nights without proceeding because we could not go ahead for fear of striking against the rocky coast.

On July 31, and August 1, we continued to windward in and out among numberless islands almost always with the same danger and identical weather, the storm not allowing us to escape either on one side or the other. In this ex-



tremity the Commandant resolved to cast anchor which we discovered at the portside of the ship. We succeeded in doing this safely with the two frigates at 9 o'clock on August 2—a day memorable for our religious order. We took possession for the second time in the name of the king in a bay not far from there and gave it the name of Our Lady de Regla.

On August 3, we drew a map of the place and we found that the coast was running from west to south. We took our position and found that we were at 59 degrees and 8 minutes north latitude and 49 degrees longitude. We did not discover any Indians nearby but in the distance we could see some. These Indians seemed well favored in comparison with those on the lands seen by us thus far. Although there is little wood and few forests on the shores yet they have plenty of water and a great deal of grass. Many flowers were in bloom and the landscape appeared beautiful beyond measure, arguing the fertility of the soil.

### The Journey Back—San Francisco

On account of the advanced season the Commandant decided on a return voyage. Moreover we had not found the passage we were seeking. We were unable to proceed further north owing to the foggy weather conditions as we were continually running into one storm after another; besides we had already lost seven men by sickness and several were attacked by scurvy and were dangerously ill. Therefore, as soon as we had a favorable wind which came on August 8 we sailed for the Mendocino Cape which we sighted on September 4. Thus after meeting with contrary winds from the south or southeast until August 22, which forced us again higher than the 54th degree of latitude and the 33d degree of longitude we finally found a favorable wind which brought us to the Mendocino Cape. Having been becalmed for eight days without further incident, on September 15 we entered the harbor of our Father, San Francisco.

Here in the Presidio they provided barracks for the sick seamen of both frigates and likewise places for the pilots who had to finish their maps and sketches of the coast and the discovered lands. We presented a beautiful picture of the Virgin de los Remedios to the Mission Church, which the Captain of the *Favorita*, Don Juan Francisco de Cuadra y Bodega had vowed to Our Lady.

This presentation was made with great solemnity. We carried it in procession and deposited it in the Church of the Mission of Our Father St. Francis, accompanied by all the officers, captains and fathers of the mission.

A high Mass was sung with all solemnity. Salvos of artillery were fired and there was general rejoicing at the success of our expedition and the day ended with a musical concert in the Plaza. The pilots continued their work on the maps and sketches until September 30 and on this day we sailed for San Blas.

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